

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE**

May 6, 2021

6:31 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Harriet Drummond, Co-Chair
Representative Andi Story, Co-Chair
Representative Tiffany Zulkosky
Representative Mike Cronk
Representative Ronald Gillham

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Grier Hopkins
Representative Mike Prax

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

HOUSE BILL NO. 164

"An Act relating to early education programs provided by school districts; relating to school age eligibility; relating to early education programs; establishing a parents as teachers program; relating to the duties of the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to certification of teachers; establishing a reading intervention program for public school students enrolled in grades kindergarten through three; establishing a reading program in the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to a virtual education consortium; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: HB 164

SHORT TITLE: EARLY ED PROGRAMS; READING; VIRTUAL ED

SPONSOR(s): REPRESENTATIVE(s) TUCK

04/07/21	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/07/21	(H)	EDC, FIN
04/21/21	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/21/21	(H)	<Bill Hearing Canceled>
04/23/21	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/23/21	(H)	Heard & Held
04/23/21	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)

04/26/21	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/26/21	(H)	Heard & Held
04/26/21	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
04/30/21	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
04/30/21	(H)	Heard & Held
04/30/21	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
05/03/21	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
05/03/21	(H)	Heard & Held
05/03/21	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
05/05/21	(H)	EDC AT 8:00 AM DAVIS 106
05/05/21	(H)	Heard & Held
05/05/21	(H)	MINUTE(EDC)
05/06/21	(H)	EDC AT 6:30 PM DAVIS 106

WITNESS REGISTER

RONDA SCHLUMBOHM
Salcha, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 164.

POSIE BOGGS
Alaska Reading Coalition
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HB 164.

REBECCA CRELLEY
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 164.

LESA MEATH
Fairbanks, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified during the hearing on HB 164.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[6:31:49 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR ANDI STORY called the House Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 6:31 p.m. Representatives Cronk, Gillham, Drummond, and Story were present at the call to order. Representative Zulkosky arrived as the meeting was in progress.

HB 164-EARLY ED PROGRAMS; READING; VIRTUAL ED

[6:32:49 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY announced that the only order of business would be HOUSE BILL NO. 164, "An Act relating to early education programs provided by school districts; relating to school age eligibility; relating to early education programs; establishing a parents as teachers program; relating to the duties of the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to certification of teachers; establishing a reading intervention program for public school students enrolled in grades kindergarten through three; establishing a reading program in the Department of Education and Early Development; relating to a virtual education consortium; and providing for an effective date." [Before the committee, adopted as a working document during the 4/23/21 House Education Standing Committee meeting, was the proposed committee substitute (CS) for HB 164, Version 32-LS0731\I, Klein, 4/20/21, ("Version I").]

[6:33:57 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY opened public testimony on HB 164, Version I.

[6:34:05 PM](#)

RONDA SCHLUMBOHM testified on HB 164. She read her prepared testimony [hard copy included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

I have been teaching beginning readers and writers in grades k-3 for thirty plus years. I hold a master's degree in reading, and I have participated in in-depth professional development by attending and teaching Alaska's Writing Consortium. This training has helped me understand the nuances of learning that all children have. I have never taught two children the same way because all children vary in skills, motivation, and interest. I applaud the desire of this group to help Alaska's children, however I believe there is much more work to do in this bill to make it the best it can be.

Please consider the following points as you work.

- The federal government is talking about funding universal pre-k. Alaska could benefit from this federal legislation and cut this fiscal part out of the bill.

- There continues to be no mention of writing in HB 164. Writing is powerful to beginning learners. When children write, they are applying their knowledge of phonics, syntax, language, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. When a child creates a piece of writing, he/she is working at the top of Bloom's Taxonomy. Writing instructs the teacher about what the child needs next. Writing can slow down the reading process to help a child make sense of how words are put together and which kinds of words do not follow the phonics rules. Initially we call these words "sight words" because kids must memorize them by sight, but all words eventually become sight words with practice.

Writing also uses the brain in more areas than reading, thus helping a child strengthen it. When a child writes, they are perfectly in their zone of proximal development. If writing is not included in this bill, my fear is that the message it sends is that it is not as important as reading.

- A third part of the bill I would like to address is a point of confusion. On page 30, line one it says, "the student will participate in additional 20 hours of individual reading improvement plan intervention services during the summer before the student enters grade four." Firstly, the retention part of the bill is very problematic. Secondly where did the 20 hours come from? Is there some research to back up the 20 hours? In my experience, if a child is struggling to learn to read, 20 hours is a drop in the bucket to being proficient, that is unless the child is on the cusp of being proficient. Malcolm Gladwell says you need 10,000 hours to be an expert at something. Which incidentally, I've done the math and that equates to over 8 years. So new teachers need to practice years until they become experts in their fields.

Thank you for allowing educators to speak to this bill. I will send this letter as written testimony along with the attachment of Peter Johnston's white paper, An Examination of Dyslexia Research and

Instruction, With Policy Implications, for your review.

[6:37:59 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE CRONK thanked Ms. Schlumbohm.

[6:38:30 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 6:39 p.m. to 6:43 p.m.

[6:43:58 PM](#)

POSIE BOGGS, Alaska Reading Coalition, testified in support of HB 164. She expressed approval of including evidence-based reading instruction, as well as of its definition in the test of the proposed legislation. She shared that she was happy to see the reading intervention service plan, and she cautioned that selecting the 10 lowest-performing schools may show lagging performance due to other factors. Might be better for data if mid-level performance schools are also selected, to show that the program could work across many levels of performance. She discussed rank and review of the language arts curricula, saying that there often isn't evidence of improvement when publishers are conducting research on their own product. With reference to the cultural sensitivity aspect of the proposed legislation, she discussed supporting teachers in both English phonemic awareness and an immersion language.

[6:51:29 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 6:51 p.m. to 6:58 p.m.

[6:58:57 PM](#)

REBECCA CRELLEY expressed the viewpoint that legislators are taking money from the Alaska permanent fund and putting it into other areas, and that there is no point to putting money into education because the quality is poor.

[7:00:39 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY reminded Ms. Crelley that the committee is hearing testimony on HB 164.

MS. CRELLEY said she wasn't talking about HB 164.

7:01:16 PM

The committee took an at-ease from 7:01 p.m. to 7:11 p.m.

7:11:47 PM

LESA MEATH read her prepared testimony [hard copy included in the committee packet], which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

Thank you for your consideration of this important initiative. One which has potential to make tremendous impact if implemented effectively and in partnership with stakeholders including families, communities and educators. I want to particularly express appreciation for scheduling time outside of the workday for giving input. Providing voluntary PreK opportunities for Alaska's students is a solid investment, and I am strongly in favor of this portion of the bill. The data is clear and there has been excellent testimony regarding the positive long-term effects of quality early childhood programs in previous hearings.

As a 30-year educator, I hold both a Master's degree and [National Board] NB certification in early childhood education. My career includes working in rural schools and those on the road system and I have seen firsthand the disparity in materials, staffing and professional learning opportunities which are available in different parts of our state. Some of the goals of HB 164 can make a real difference in reading achievement. We also need to be mindful that in an enthusiasm to measure and quantify learning in only standardized ways that we do not expand the disconnect between Indigenous ways of knowing and the compartmentalized manner of some westernized programs.

Concerns I have are related to the prescriptiveness, and the reporting requirements in the bill. Many of the mentions in Article 15 are already taking places in Alaska's schools. In others, they may have the components in their plans, but simply do not have the staffing to implement. How are the paraprofessionals and teachers going to manage writing the reports, running parent workshops and after school intervention opportunities, not to mention the summer learning? Some of our schools have very few staff members or

have positions unfilled. Even in large districts acquiring personnel for interventionists and substitutes is challenging.

The reading services in Sec. 14.30.765 include many components of an effective early reading program, but the challenge is "... to the extent practicable." (p. 26, Line 11) This is where input needs to be explicitly sought from our CSI and TSI identified schools and other sites in remote villages. What will make a difference for their staff and students? How will it be ensured that supports are value added and not punitive? There is mention of "error correction and feedback," (p. 26, line 22) which seems a bit out of place and overly specific [sic]. Feedback does have a crucial role in learners' awareness of their errors and performance. However, immediate correction can sometimes be harmful if it disrupts a child's time to think on his/her error and maintain the flow of communication. Depending on the setting, the lesson goal, and the individual child, and relationship with the assessor/interventionist sometimes feedback should be given afterward.

There are complex reasons that some children have reading problems and all are not going to respond to the same interventions in the same way. This is why school staff meet as PLCs (Professional Learning Communities) to examine data with colleagues, plan instruction, meet with families, and have special educators as a resource.

I applaud the addition of and attention to Culturally Responsive education, Developmentally Appropriate practice and the inclusion of oral language. Literacy is comprehensive and includes reading, writing, speaking & listening. I do however want to caution about appropriate assessments, particularly with second language learners. There needs to be expanded definitions to have common understanding of Culturally Responsive and not just a box to check off. Is it culturally responsive to focus on screeners using timed oral reading fluency? Is it culturally responsive to require interventions outside of the school day preventing students from engaging in family time, subsistence activities and place-based learning?

Lastly, a great reading teacher evaluates students, engages in ongoing formative assessment and uses data to differentiate instruction for individuals, small groups and the whole class. We build relationships with each student and inform ourselves about their interests, and topics they find engaging. We build libraries to provide them with exciting titles across genre and read with them - noting strategy use, building on their strengths and addressing areas for growth. The tools in the toolbox of reading teachers are many and should be continually expanding with strong professional development and the availability of new research. There is no "one size fits all" set of materials or methods, but we do know that a strong literacy foundation is learner centered - not program centered.

[7:16:43 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR DRUMMOND thanked Ms. Meath for taking the time to provide feedback to the committee.

MS. MEATH shared that she is grateful for the privilege to teach in Alaska.

[7:17:18 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 7:17 p.m. to 7:19 p.m.

[7:19:46 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY provided the schedule for public testimony and committee hearings on HB 164.

[The committee took an at-ease from 7:21 p.m. to 7:31 p.m.]

[7:31:38 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR STORY, after ascertaining that no one else wished to testify, closed public testimony on HB 164. She then announced that HB 164 was held over.

[7:34:05 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Education Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 7:34 p.m.